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Years in Cultural Studies

1983—Stuart Hall Visits Australia and North America

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ABSTRACT Throughout 1983 Cultural Studies continued to spread outside the United Kingdom, spurred by Stuart Hall's tour of Australia and parts of the United States where he presented lectures connecting current ideas of what it means to study culture in often disparate and intense political climates across the globe. Myriad publications published in 1983 provide insight into how Cultural Studies circulated among scholars in varying disciplines while still in its infancy. This article situates Cultural Studies primarily within a North American context focusing on the pivotal event of the year: the teaching institute held prior to the 1983 conference at the University of Illinois where Hall delivered what would be eight influential lectures in the field of Cultural Studies. Further, I provide insight into an understudied conference held in Australia where Hall's impact led to the birth of an Australian Cultural Studies journal. Finally, I provide an overview of some of the pivotal publications of the year, connecting ideas of hegemony, power and dominance, reflexivity and Marxism within a western context.

Throughout 1983, cultural studies continued to spread outside the United Kingdom, spurred by Stuart Hall's tour of Australia and parts of the United States during which he presented lectures connecting current ideas of what it means to study culture in often disparate and intense political climates across the globe. Myriad articles published in 1983 provide insight into how cultural studies circulated among scholars in varying disciplines while still in its infancy. This article situates cultural studies primarily within a North American context focusing on the pivotal event of the year: the teaching institute, "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries," held prior to the 1983 conference at the University of Illinois, where Hall delivered what would be eight influential lectures in the field of cultural studies. Further, I provide insight into an understudied conference held in Australia where Hall's impact led to the birth of an Australian cultural studies journal. Finally, I provide an overview of some of the pivotal publications of the year, which connected ideas of hegemony, power and dominance, reflexivity, and Marxism. This year is important precisely because Hall's lectures and the publications discussed below played an important role in advancing the theoretical framework for cultural studies' future scholarship. We see this in Renato Rosaldo's response to the events that occur in 1983. These important contributions to cultural studies in 1983 bolstered future publications by providing direction to scholars eager to offer their own insight on ideas central to the field.

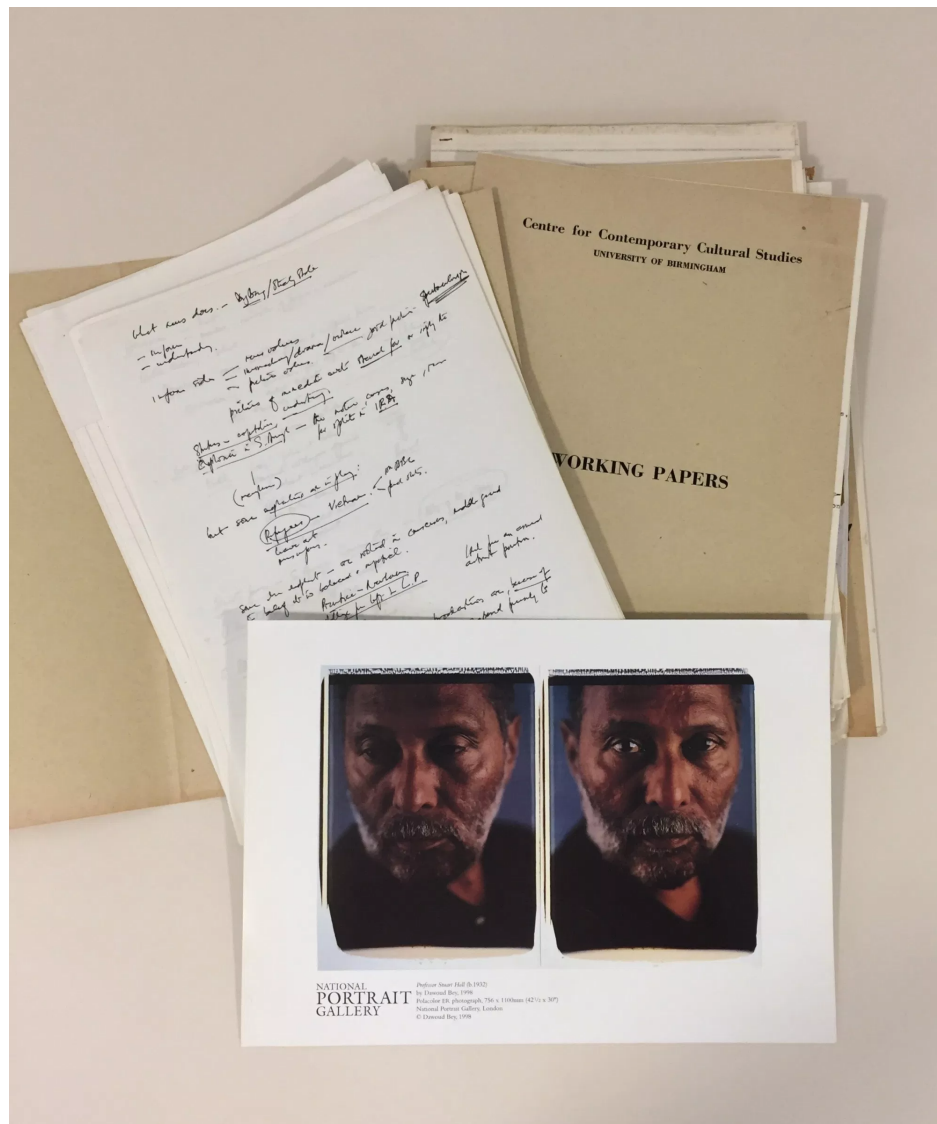


Exhibit Photograph of Stuart Hall's papers from the Cadbury Research Library's University Heritage Archive Collection, University of Birmingham, UK

In the early 1980s, cultural studies was still struggling for global recognition, including in the United Kingdom and the United States.¹ Often utilized in smaller fields like communication studies and education within the UK, contributions made by scholars in the Birmingham Centre were not widely known by those outside the country. In July 1983, a Jamaican scholar living and teaching in England arrived on the campus of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to deliver what would become eight foundational lectures in the field of cultural studies. Stuart Hall presented his original thoughts, connections, and assertions, which contributed greatly to the formation of cultural studies in North America. Just one month after Margaret Thatcher was unanimously elected to office again in the United Kingdom, Hall delivered his speaking series titled "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, and Boundaries," that would become an influential set of ideas impacting cultural theory still today. The effect of this series is explicated through myriad interdisciplinary publications and is evident in a particularly relevant piece by Renato Rosaldo, published in part as a response to the popularity of Hall's lectures and the conference that followed.² His talk and subsequent published manuscript in *American Anthropologist* focuses on the disruption offered by cultural studies while critiquing United States intellectual politics.

As Rosaldo's piece suggests, Hall's visit to the University of Illinois had direct effects on scholars within the United States and elsewhere, leading many to question the

interdisciplinarity of cultural studies and what kind of scholarship those with serious commitments to the field should be putting forth. 1983 is a particularly relevant year for cultural studies, bolstered by the resurgence of Hall's lectures published in a 2016 edited volume by Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. This article questions how the publication of these lectures increased Hall's significance in this contemporary moment and adds to continuing conversations of his impact on the field.

Hall Visits Australia

Hall's 1983 lectures are part of an introductory canon that would establish boundaries around cultural studies—boundaries that became evident through the scholarship that would surface in the coming years in the United States. However, Curthoys and Docker assert Hall's impact outside of the United Kingdom was felt by scholars even earlier, with "Cultural Studies in Australia being already a lively and varied scene, fissiparous, noisy, inchoate, its many strands ranging in theoretical approach and methodology."³ Three months prior to Hall's engagement at the University of Illinois, Hall attended the Marx Symposium in Sydney Australia, hosted by Marxist journal *Australian Left Review*. There, Hall gave his main address, "For a Marxism without Guarantees," which encouraged scholars to view Marx's writings as a guide for thinking about the present day.⁴



"For a Marxism Without Guarantees," *Australian Left Review* 84, page 39.

Before leaving the country, Hall stopped through Canberra to give a talk at Australian National University. The university's newspaper, *Woroni*, claimed Hall's visit to campus passed "virtually unnoticed," but still, the seminar room was packed with people who heard of the event through word-of-mouth.⁵ Hall's talk on the welfare state asserted that the threat posed by small government monetarism resulted "largely from a failure of the left of the British Labour Party to promote the notion of the State as a servant of the people."⁶ Hall's insights throughout the talk were relevant to structures within the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere, but situated within the context of university progress and student power. Calling for students to no longer accept that academics and bureaucrats should be solely responsible for what occurs on campus and in educational settings, Hall encouraged students to demand equal rights as students, to take control of what they're learning and how they are assessed.

Later that year, after Hall had left the country, the Australian Communication Association (ACA) Conference was held in Sydney. The discipline of mass communication studies within Australian universities was growing, thanks to the Hall-style scholarship, and the study of popular culture was gaining ground with Australian scholars. However, this

meant the group was continually at odds with the interpersonal communication studies discipline flourishing at the same time.⁷ In a conference report, Curthoys commented on the “yawning intellectual chasm” between the two disciplines, which held entirely separate sessions throughout the conference.⁸ Much of the debate came within mass communication over questions of popular culture, causing an uproar in various presentation panels throughout the conference. Hall’s textual study of popular culture spurred such discussion throughout many sessions, and at the end of the conference the ACA ultimately agreed to sponsor the new *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*.⁹ One could assert Hall’s scholarship and his tour played an integral role in the furthering of cultural studies within an Australian context and was further globalized upon his arrival in the United States.

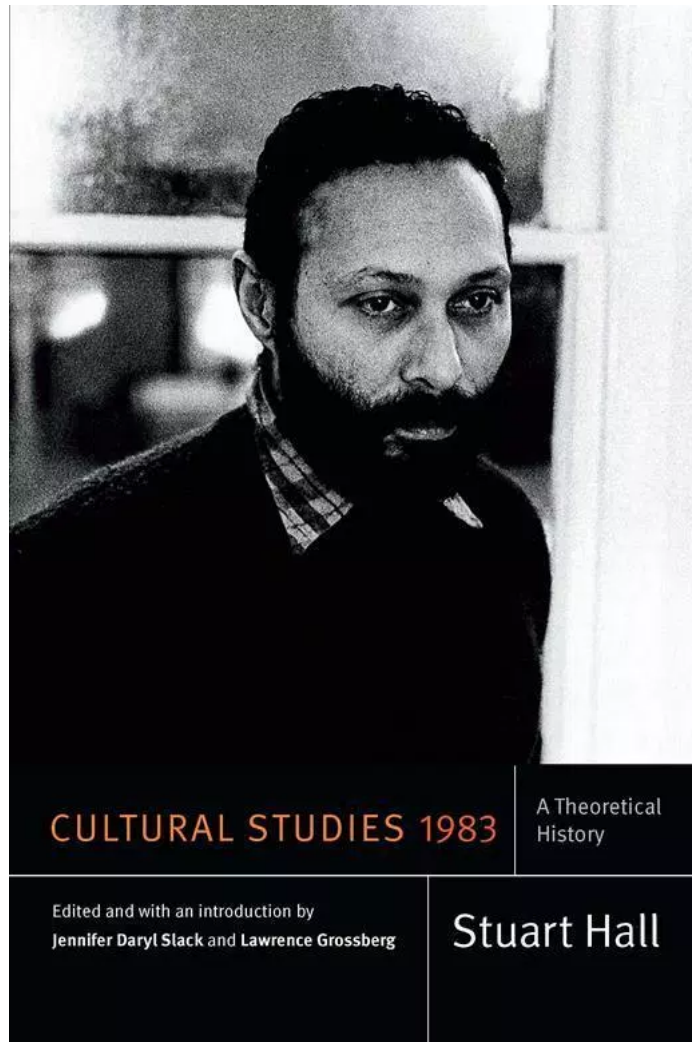
Hall’s Lectures at the 1983 University of Illinois Conference

While the ACA debates were occurring in Sydney, American scholars gathered at the University of Illinois to discuss Marxist approaches within the field of cultural studies. Days before the conference was set to begin, a teaching institute was hosted where Hall was scheduled to give eight distinct lectures introducing cultural studies to Americans. Hall’s speaking series titled ‘Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, and Boundaries,’ was the first sustained exposure many intellectuals had ideas coming out of the Birmingham Centre and The Open University, where Hall had been appointed Professor of Sociology in 1980. A young scholar in attendance at the institute, Jennifer Slack, asked Hall if she might be allowed to record all eight of his lectures. As if she knowingly assumed the relevance of the lectures to come, Slack sat in the front row of the lecture hall and recorded and transcribed each lecture with Hall’s permission. Later, Slack and Lawrence Grossberg would elude to the fact that they hoped the set of lectures would be turned into a book soon after the conference ended. Hall revised and edited each lecture and in 1988 wrote a preface to introduce the collection but ultimately felt the lectures were dated and no longer relevant to many conversations occurring at the time, most notably, the feminist movement.

Hall was adamant the lectures be updated before becoming available to the public. Slack and Grossberg write, “[Hall] suggested that he would want to update and extend the story, suggested that he had come to some sort of terms with developments in Cultural Studies that postdated where the lectures left out—particular chapters on post-structuralism, subjectivity, and the engagement with feminism.”¹⁰ However, Slack and Grossberg insisted the lectures should stand as they were originally presented within the particular historical moment. Hall agreed to allow the collection to be published only if presented as a historical document, “as a story constructed at a particular moment and from a particular perspective about developments that by the very act of being narrated were being artificially closed, as if they were finished.”¹¹ Hall felt editing the lectures into a book gave it a level of closure intended to stand alone and not be challenged by future discussions of what constituted a theoretical history of cultural studies, and therefore, was hesitant to publish.

Shortly after the esteemed sociologist and founder of the Birmingham Centre passed away in 2014, Slack and Grossberg were granted permission from Catherine Hall to publish the collection. Slack’s transcriptions were edited minimally in order to preserve the “characteristic rhythms of Hall’s oral delivery” and published as *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*.¹² The edited volume was published in October 2016, two years after the scholar passed. The collection includes an introduction written by the editors as a sort of tribute to the great scholar, Hall’s original preface written in 1988, and all eight lectures given at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Functioning as a record of the event, as the editors note, rather than a theoretical position of sorts, the edition is

unique in being one of the few volumes in which Hall is the solo author and does not include collaborative work.



Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History published in 2016

Throughout each lecture, Hall insists that the aim of cultural studies is to entice political change, presenting a totalizing Marxist inflection. As Sergiy Yakovenko noted in a review, the book might have been named “Marxism and Cultural Studies 1983,” providing a more candid indication of what is included in the volume.¹³ The lectures function as an intervention into debates facing cultural theorists after World War II. In Lecture One, Hall makes the crucial point of referring to cultural studies as a political project rather than intellectual pursuit. The intellectual notes the importance of Richard Hoggart, diving into Hoggart’s past and how his working-class upbringing lead him to include a groundbreaking method of research where he studied individuals in an observational way, similar to reading prose. Similarly, Hall tips his hat to Raymond Williams and ideas of culture and its connection to lived experiences. Time and again, Hall introduces the key thinkers integral to the foundation of cultural studies and the Birmingham Centre to his audience at Illinois.

Hall includes equally broad and complicated ideas of dominant ideology and hegemony, providing genealogical connections between various historical contexts. In Lectures Five and Six, Hall addresses Althusser, ideology, and articulation; much of the lectures were reorganized and published in “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates.”¹⁴ In these lectures, Hall speaks specifically toward his own Blackness to illustrate the work of both ideology and articulation in ways new to his

audience. Similarly, ideas brought forth in Hall's Lecture Seven on Gramsci, ideological struggle, and cultural resistance was soon after published in "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity."¹⁵ Much of Hall's lecture series were transformed into published works that would become influential to many future scholars including Slack and Grossberg.

While many lectures were later published, some of the lectures addressed concerns spoken about on Hall's previous Australian tour, particular in connection to Marx's strengths and weaknesses. As noted by Curthoys & Docker, Hall speaks directly to Marx in the fourth lecture given at Illinois, asserting that capitalism uses and builds upon different forms of labor, rather than eroding the particularities of different forms of labor.¹⁶ Thus, Hall argues, exploiting indigenous labor and material resources. In Lecture Three, Hall focuses on the non-Marxist sources of structuralist thinking, particularly focusing on the works of Durkheim and Levi-Strauss. Hall addressed the work of Durkheim in marking the connections between cultural theory and sociology, presumably to provide contextual references for his American audience. In a review of Hall's lectures, Sofia Ropek Hewson notes, "theories may be layered on top of each other, they may share the same discourses, but we still need new ones, particularly in times of significant political change."¹⁷ Hall often connected cultural studies to well-known theories and theorists in other disciplines as a way to further explain how one might approach cultural analysis. This tactic was evident throughout pivotal publications in 1983.

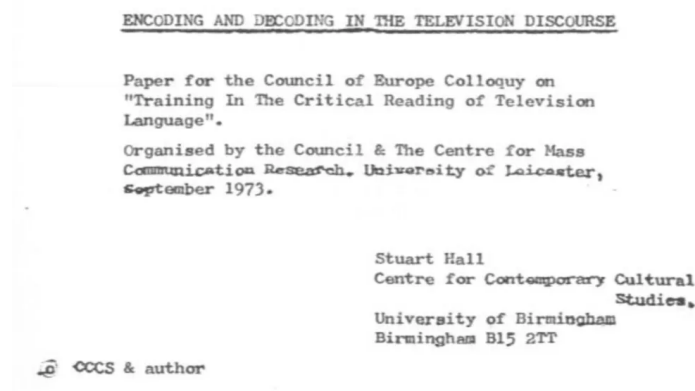
1983: Pivotal Publications on Culture

Various articles influenced by cultural studies were published in 1983, including pivotal publications by James Carey, Geert Hofstede, Justin Wren-Lewis, and Richard Johnson. With their disparate backgrounds and training, the scholars provided insight into how ideas within the discipline were being taken up by those in Birmingham, the United States, and elsewhere. In a short article published in the *Journal of Communication* in the summer of 1983, James W. Carey articulated the struggle of American cultural studies to fully grasp concepts integral to the origins of the field, mainly power, dominance, subordination, and ideology.¹⁸ Published within weeks of Hall's visit to the University of Illinois, Carey touches on the beginnings of cultural studies in Britain as a response to political conditions of that particular moment, contrasting with what was occurring within the United States. Further, Carey calls for scholars to produce a "vocabulary through what it is possible *in principle* to think of the mass media in relation to everything else . . . that does not artificially constrain one from thinking of the mass media in their widest possible context."¹⁹ This call would reinvigorate scholars to consider questions of power and dominance when examining societies structured in and by communication.

The year 1983 marks cultural studies' expansion beyond communication and into the realm of business management. Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede, author of the 1980 seminal work "Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values,"²⁰ published "The Cultural Relativity of Organizational Practices and Theories" in the *Journal of International Business Studies*.²¹ The influential article would go on to win the journal's "Decade Award," which recognizes the article from each year that has had the greatest impact on future scholarship in the decade that followed. Calling for scholars to avoid the ethnocentrism present in current management theories within psychology and sociology, Hofstede's 1983 article summarized the scholar's previously published research exploring the work-related values of employees from 50 countries.²² Hofstede used his four dimensions of national culture to explain differences in management styles and organizational tactics in workplaces around the globe. His argument, that these activities are culturally dependent, provided a new framework for understanding and

managing intercultural negotiations, as well as improving multicultural organizations like the United Nations.

In the early 1970s, Hall published the first rendition of his encoding/decoding theory highlighting the importance of active recipient interpretation within mass communication messages.²³ This model was used in myriad works to follow, including that of Charlotte Brundson and David Morley.²⁴ Justin Wren-Lewis published a response to Hall's piece in 1983, suggesting Hall's piece was simply a "semiological conception."²⁵ Despite Hall's efforts to emphasize agency of audiences, Wren-Lewis argues that the model characterizes television in a way that suggests it reproduces meanings already held, rather than producing new meaning. Ultimately, Wren-Lewis argues that the practice of decoding requires appropriately theorized conceptions of audiences along with empirical studies, such as interviews, in order to bridge the gap between what he believes to be the overtheorized encoding and textual analysis aspects of research and the undertheorized ideas of decoding presented in Morley's work.²⁶



Original 1973 Typescript Title Page: "Encoding and Decoding in The Television Discourse" by Stuart Hall

Finally, Richard Johnson's working paper "What is Cultural Studies Anyway?" attempts to deconstruct the history of cultural studies and how the discipline grew out of literary criticism.²⁷ Connecting ideas to Marxism, mass culture, and the work of the communist party, Johnson's article would go on to be published in *Social Text* in the winter of 1986 and become a canonical text within the field.²⁸ Johnson sums up the three approaches for cultural studies—production-based, text-based, and studies of lived culture—ultimately arguing that combining all three approaches is an inadequate direction for the future and thus, scholars must continue refining how they study the life cycle of cultural objects.²⁹ This text would resurface more than ten years later in the paramount project, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of The Sony Walkman*.³⁰

Future Exploration of The Year in Cultural Studies: 1983














The events and publications of 1983 are disparate, yet each contribution continues to expand the field of cultural studies into unexplored geographic and intellectual spaces. While this review is not comprehensive, it provides a starting point from which to understand the process of thinkers like Stuart Hall and the impact their ideas continue to have today. Publications like those of Rosaldo and others, along with the 2016 publication of Hall's lectures, explicate the importance of the year 1983 to cultural studies today. The contributions of Carey, Hofstede, Wren-Lewis, and Johnson to the contemporary moment endure through conversations by those both within and outside of cultural studies. There are many changes between what concerned cultural studies in 1983 and what we are concerned with today. The pieces referenced in this article remind us that cultural studies requires significant periods or moments where reflection, renewal, and re-composition

(or de-composition) are necessary to the relationship between the concept of cultural studies as a conversation and cultural studies' methodology of conjunctural analysis.

Although this essay focused on Hall, Hall himself resisted such hagiography. Therefore, other work on 1983 should explore the various contributions made throughout the year beyond Hall. This review is centered within Western culture, but that is not to suggest important work was not occurring elsewhere. Scholars might consider furthering the work submitted here by exploring historical events in other areas of the world that surely impacted the scholarship published in 1983 and beyond. This project would benefit from an in-depth look at the political climate surrounding the Birmingham School throughout 1983 with the reelection of Margaret Thatcher. While this project elected to focus on how cultural studies expanded outside of the United Kingdom, it is important to analyze the environment from which the ideology came in order to garner a more complete understanding of how the field has changed over time.

Notes

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2. Rosaldo, Renato, "Whose Cultural Studies?" *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 3 (1994): 524–529. [↗](#)
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6. "Stuart Hall on the Welfare State." [↗](#)
7. Steven Maras, "Thinking about the History of the ANZCA: An Australian Perspective," *Australian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 2 (2004): 13–51. [↗](#)
8. Ann Curthoys, "'I Want to Disagree with Everything That's Been Said So Far': The Australian Communication Association Conference," *Listening Post* 46 (1983): 21–22. [↗](#)
9. Curthoys and Docker, "Stuart Hall." [↗](#)
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11. Slack and Grossberg, "Introduction," x. [↗](#)
12. Slack and Grossberg, "Introduction," xiii. [↗](#)
13. Sergiy Yakovenko, "Yakovenko on Hall, 'Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History,'" *H-Russia* 232 (2016), <https://networks.h-net.org/node/10000/reviews/162181/yakovenko-hall-cultural-studies-1983-theoretical-history>. [↗](#)
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16. Curthoys and Docker, "Stuart Hall," 167. [↗](#)
17. Sofia Ropek Hewson, review of *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, by Stuart Hall, *LSE Review of Books*, March 2017,

18. James W. Carey, "The Origins of the Radical Discourse on Cultural Studies in the United States," *Journal of Communication* 33, no. 3 (1983): 311–313. 
19. Carey, "Origins," 313. 
20. Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1980). 
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22. Hofstede, "Cultural Relativity." 
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